



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health - Papers

Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health

2016

Lessons from living below the extreme poverty line on \$2 a day

Karen E. Charlton

University of Wollongong, karenc@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

Charlton, K. (2016). Lessons from living below the extreme poverty line on \$2 a day. *The Conversation*, 10 May 1-4.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Lessons from living below the extreme poverty line on \$2 a day

Abstract

\$2 a day bought me a lacto-ovo-pesco vegetarian style diet (milk, eggs and fish) but with very small quantities of protein foods

Disciplines

Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Charlton, K. (2016). Lessons from living below the extreme poverty line on \$2 a day. *The Conversation*, 10 May 1-4.

THE CONVERSATION



Lessons from living below the extreme poverty line on \$2 a day

May 10, 2016 2.07pm AEST

\$2 a day bought me a lacto-ovo-pesco vegetarian style diet (milk, eggs and fish) but with very small quantities of protein foods. Peterfz30/Shutterstock

Karen Charlton

Associate Professor, School of Medicine, University of Wollongong

The Conversation's partners

[View partners of The Conversation](#)

Around 2.5 million Australians live below the poverty line on less than \$400 a week for a single adult or A\$841 for a couple with two children.

I joined 8,500 Australians on the **charity challenge** last week to live below the extreme poverty line, spending just \$2 a day on food for five days.

This is my third year doing the challenge and this year my husband joined me. Having \$20 between two seemed to stretch much further than \$10 for one person. But it was still tough and my diet was far from complete.

Budgeting and food choices

Essentially, \$2 a day bought me a lacto-ovo-pesco vegetarian-style diet (milk, eggs and fish) but with very small quantities of these protein foods.

Five day food budget: my 2014 and 2016 choices

2016 Food ▼	Cost	2014 Food	Cost
Brown onion (1 ½)	0.22	Brown onion (1)	0.25
Butter (100g)	0.56	-	-
Butternut (400g)	1.04	Carrots (2; 140g)	0.35
Couscous (150 g)	0.47	-	-
Dried chick peas (140g)	0.47	Dried chick peas (190g)	0.9
Eggs (2 ½)	0.58	-	-
Garlic cloves (1 clove)	0.22	Garlic cloves (4 cloves)	0.32
Italian tomato sauce (pureed; 350 g)	0.75	Tin tomatoes (375g)	0.59
Milk (full cream) (1L)	1	Milk (full cream) (2L)	2
Pasta (fettucine; 250g)	0.45	Long grain rice (500g)	0.75
Pasta (penne; 250g)	0.45	Spaghetti (500g)	0.99
Porridge Oats (350g)	0.53	Porridge oats (375g)	0.76
Potato (unwashed) (320g)	0.59	-	-
Red chilli (15g)	0.23	Red chilli hot (45g)	0.45
Self raising flour (500g)	0.37	-	-
Soup mix (pulse mix; 130g)	0.5	Dried brown Lentils (190g)	1.02
Stock cubes (veg) (1 ½ cubes)	0.37	Stock cubes (veg) (3 cubes)	0.54
Sugar (40g)	0.15	Sugar (150g)	0.14
Tinned tuna in oil (212g)	1	-	-
TOTAL	\$9.95	TOTAL	\$9.94

Dried chickpeas and a legume-based soup mix added to the protein content and provided a nutritious and tasty soup. The inclusion of flour in the food budget meant I could have damper to accompany my meals.

Vegetable choices were limited to the cheaper ones such as potatoes, butternut, onions and Italian pureed tomato sauce – nothing green in sight.

I had to select cage eggs rather than free range, limiting my choice about animal welfare.

In addition to the limited variety of foods, the exclusion of fruit meant this diet didn't meet the Australian dietary guidelines. There were no healthy fats such as avocado, oily fish or olive oil. Nor did this diet result in weight loss because it was not low in kilojoules.



Long-term implications

Around 760,000 Australian adults (4.5%) are at risk of iron deficiency anaemia. My iron intake averaged 9 milligrams a day, which is only half the recommended dietary allowance of 18 mg a day.

A bowl of vegetable soup with potatoes, carrots, and green beans, served with three golden-brown pan-fried flatbreads on a white plate. The meal is set on a red textured placemat.

Had I substituted my homemade damper for commercial bread, I would have received higher amounts of both of these nutrients since **bread is required** to contain folic acid and iodine.

Variety is the spice of life

By far the most difficult part of living below the extreme poverty line is the lack of variety. The diet was bland in colour because of the lack of variety, thereby indicating a poorer quality diet.

I repeated the same meal because it's cheaper to buy in bulk. Leftovers simply cannot be thrown away, so food waste becomes much less than the average 41% of household garbage.

Spending money on beverages was not an option. I drank only water – hot and cold. Next year, teabags will be an essential item.

Time management and forward planning

Another difficulty is the need to plan ahead. Having only \$2 a day means that all foods eaten outside of the household need to be prepared beforehand.

I also spent hours more than usual doing the weekly shop. I visited three different grocery stores to compare prices, including a large greengrocer, Aldi and IGA. It pays to shop around but those on low incomes would ill afford the transport costs associated with going from shop to shop.

Australian households' spending on food

Contrary to popular belief, Australian households spend more on current (unhealthy) diets than required to purchase healthy (recommended) diets. The majority (53-64%) of food budgets is spent on “discretionary” choices: foods that aren't essential to health that are high in saturated fat and sugar (this includes take-away foods and alcohol).

There has been much **debate** about the impact of changing the goods and service tax (GST) to encompass basic healthy foods. This would increase the cost of healthy diets by around 10%. In real terms, a healthy diet would cost a family of two adults and two children an extra \$56.39 per week.

Since low-income families spend a higher proportion of their disposable income on food, around 30%, this tax change would hit the poorest hardest. Such a change would have a devastating impact on people living below the poverty line.

After five days living on \$2 a day for food, I have a much greater respect for those living on a tight budget. And I will think twice before spending two days' allowance on a coffee, or even buying a bottle of water.



Another dinner meal: tinned tuna and potato fishcakes with chickpeas.



Food and nutrition

Poverty

GST

Poverty line



Tweet114



Share148



Get newsletter